



Place of Last Drink (POLD) Case Study: Brainerd, MN

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Introduction

Place of Last Drink (POLD) is a strategy to reduce illegal service of alcohol to obviously intoxicated customers ("overservice") at licensed establishments such as bars and restaurants. Place of last drink can be asked about and recorded for alcohol-related incidents such as drinking and driving, underage drinking, assaults, etc. POLD uses these data to identify establishments that demonstrate a pattern of overservice. When these establishments are identified, it is possible to then intervene to prevent future overservice of alcohol.

Brainerd, Minnesota—the Community

Brainerd, Minnesota is located in central Minnesota in Crow Wing County, on the Mississippi River about three hours northwest of the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area. As of the 2020 Census, Brainerd's population was 14,395. According to the 2015-2019 American Community Survey, the median income was \$34,371, 92% of residents had completed high school or more, and 92% of its population identified as white, 3% as Black or African American, 2% as American Indian/Alaska Native, and 1% as Hispanic/Latinx.¹ Brainerd is one of the larger cities in central Minnesota and located in a popular vacation area with many lakes and outdoor tourist attractions.

POLD Components

As part of this case study, we collected information related to the four components of POLD: (1) Startup—how POLD began in the community, (2) Data Collection & Review—how POLD data are collected and whether the data are regularly reviewed, (3) Stakeholder Awareness—which and how often stakeholders are informed about POLD and results of POLD, and (4) Follow up—whether and how POLD data are used to prevent future overservice.

Component #1: Startup

Brainerd is home to an air EMS base operated by North Memorial Health, which also operates a Level 1 Trauma Center in the Minneapolis area and provides ambulance service for many central Minnesota communities. Staff from North Memorial Health Hospital have long expressed concern about the role of alcohol in traffic crashes and other medical emergencies and encouraged police departments to collect POLD data. Due to this encouragement and the realization that POLD would provide useful and actionable data to address alcohol-related problems in the community, Brainerd's police chief made the decision to implement POLD in 2016. Additionally, the chief was aware that neighboring cities were collecting POLD data, so he it made sense for the Brainerd Police Department (PD) to participate.

¹ US Census Bureau: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/brainerdcityminnesota/POP010220#POP010220>

Component #2: Data Collection and Review

Brainerd PD follows a standard practice when collecting POLD data. When an officer responds to an incident where there is suspicion of someone under the influence of alcohol, the officer requests a preliminary breath test and asks, “Where was your last drink?” Officers try to identify a specific place, whether within or outside of the PD’s jurisdiction, and record the location information. The officer also notes if the person refuses to provide the information. Because an officer is already creating a report of the incident, recording POLD information is quick, adding less than a minute to their process. If POLD data are collected during a call for service, a custom attribute (an internal department designation that flags an incident for follow-up attention) is indicated to notify supervisors that a POLD entry was made. In addition to internal tracking and use of POLD data, a designated staff person in the PD enters POLD data periodically into the online multijurisdictional database. Individual law enforcement agencies manage their own data and enter it into the database.

Initially Brainerd PD collected POLD data for all types of locations, including private residences and parks. However, starting in 2021 they limited collection to licensed alcohol establishments. This decision was made because officers were not using data to follow up on locations other than alcohol establishments. An officer described the rationale to focus on establishments:

“I just think by now limiting our collection to bars, restaurants, that’ll give us a much [clearer] picture of the problems of over-serving in those types of environments... We’re gathering less data, but I think it’s more meaningful.”

POLD data are collected fairly consistently, and police say, “we do a pretty good job of keeping tabs on it.” Officers consider collecting the data as a routine part of doing their job. There are a few situations when collecting POLD data may be deprioritized, such as when securing medical assistance takes precedence or when the safety and welfare of a victim may take priority. The officer added, “We don’t collect it on all calls, but I think we do a fairly thorough job of getting it when it’s applicable.”

When Brainerd PD first began collecting POLD data, they placed large stickers on each officer’s preliminary breath test unit that reminded officers to collect POLD data. However, over time, the stickers lost their “attention-getting” value. A PD representative suggested, “I guess we’re probably due for some new stickers...a new attention grabber.”

Component #3: Stakeholder Awareness

Brainerd officers increase awareness of POLD data collection by providing *Retail Alcohol Vendor* training for licensed alcohol establishments. The training emphasizes that alcohol establishments who allow overservice of alcohol increase their exposure to liability, and put their patrons, employees and the general public in danger. While not every establishment is required to participate in training every year, those who have been identified as having violations or alcohol-related service issues (such as failing a compliance check) are required to undergo training. Brainerd PD has two officers assigned to conduct the trainings, which are available two

times each year. Officers who conduct the training say the response from establishments is generally positive, and that often the POLD data and statistics provide information that establishments did not previously know. The PD does not send any regular mailings or notifications beyond the *Retail Alcohol Vendor* training but they are confident that establishments are quite aware that POLD data are collected. As a member of the department said, “We’re pretty open and transparent with people.”

Component #4: Follow Up

The Brainerd PD uses POLD data in concert with license inspections and other oversight: “I look at our Retail Alcohol Vendor Education and Place of Last Drink as a hand-in-hand thing.” Generally, POLD information is shared at the *Retailer Alcohol Vendor* training. When officers meet with establishment owners or managers about problems related to sales to underage patrons (indicated via compliance checks), they also discuss POLD data.

While POLD data to date have not identified any situations that required follow-up enforcement actions with licensed establishments, such as citations or penalties, the PD said it is valuable to compile POLD data in the event that a licensed establishment develops an issue that cannot be resolved with education and monitoring. An officer explained: “[POLD] gives you a recourse or some data for potential recourse if that establishment operates outside of social norms and/or the law. It gives law enforcement another option for some kind of enforcement action if it ever gets to that point.”

The Brainerd PD does not have a specific process for presenting POLD data to the City Council, but the PD and the Council are part of a licensing oversight body and the data are available if the Council has questions or wants additional information when renewing alcohol licenses. Education, rather than punishment, is the goal for Brainerd PD: “We’re trying to ensure compliance of our retail alcohol vendors.”

Lessons Learned

POLD fits with and complements other alcohol monitoring and enforcement strategies: Brainerd PD conducts compliance checks, provides *Alcohol Vendor Training*, monitors alcohol establishments, and monitors POLD incidents. These together help the PD have a comprehensive picture of how well establishments are complying with alcohol service laws.

Identify what POLD data is most relevant for your jurisdiction: When Brainerd PD first began documenting POLD data, they collected data for any location, including residential and public locations. However, because they did not use the data from locations that were not licensed alcohol establishments, they concluded that it was not a good use of their resources to continue collecting POLD data on other locations. Thus, they focus on identifying alcohol establishments that are a place of last drink because ensuring establishments are operating responsibly is their priority.

Focusing on compliance and responsible service may help secure buy-in with establishments: Licensed establishments with POLD incidents receive training to encourage compliance and help them identify areas for improvement. Brainerd PD does not focus on penalizing establishments or putting them out of business—they want establishments to succeed and operate responsibly. To date, notifying establishments when they have had POLD incidents and requiring training have been sufficient to focus establishments’ attention on the issue; enforcement actions have not been necessary.

Conclusion

Collecting and using POLD data has been positive for the Brainerd PD. POLD complements other efforts used by the department to monitor alcohol sales and encourage its alcohol establishments to operate responsibly, with the goal of reducing alcohol-related problems in the community and keeping its residents and visitors safe. One officer summed it up: “If we can help one person, it’s worth it. If we can prevent one fatal, bad car accident or one domestic situation, because somebody got cut off, then I think it’s worth the data collection and the time that we put into it.”

Additional Resources

For more information about POLD, please go to our website: aep.umn.edu

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